

# BHARAT MILAP

FROM THE TAMIL RAMAYANA OF KAMBAN

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## FOREWORD

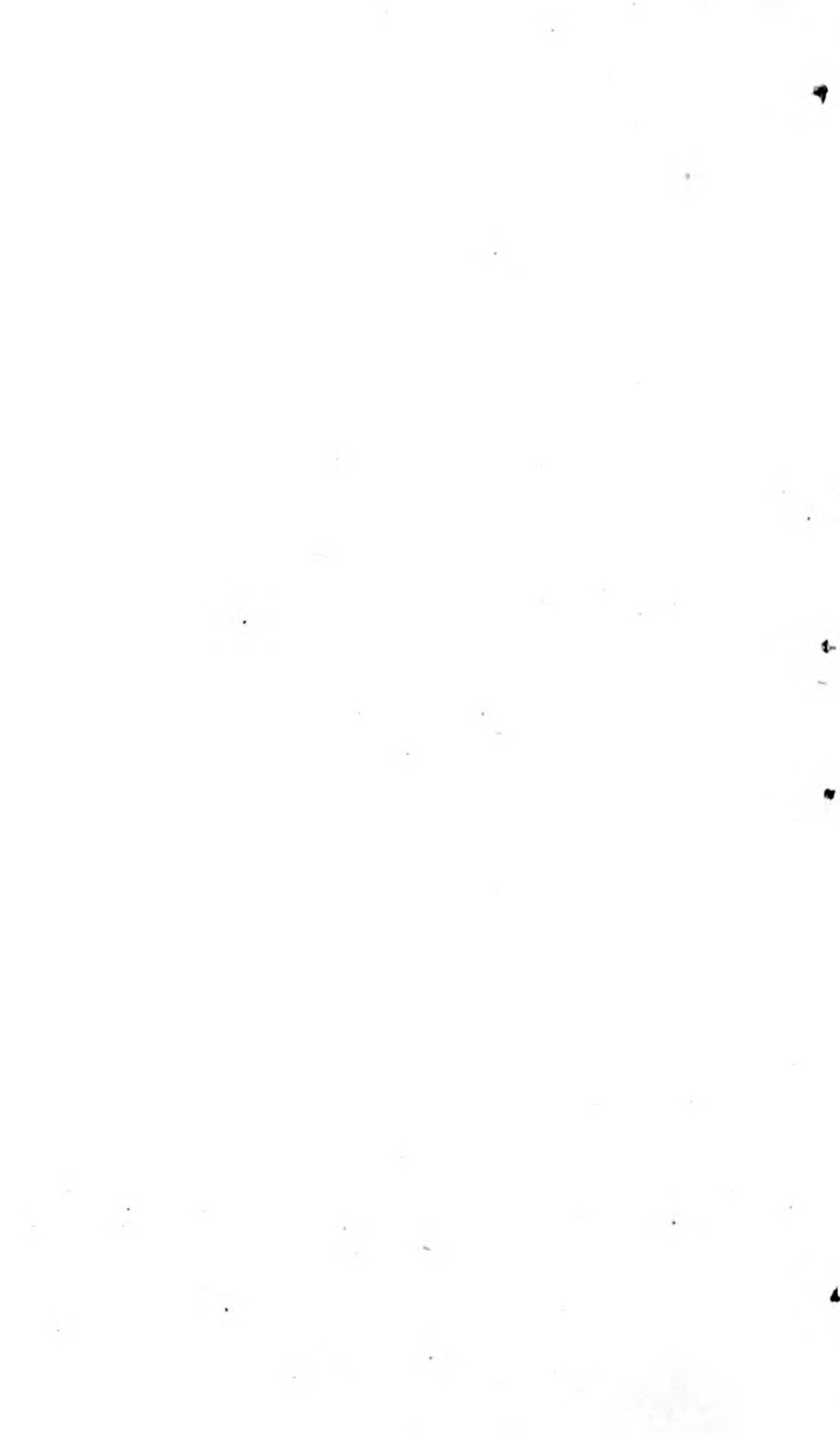
Kamban, like Tulsidas, was a Bhakta first and a poet next. No wonder that devotion and piety suffused and permeated his entire work. His poetry is no less attractive. Like Tulsidas, Kamban also seems to have reached the acme of pathos in *Ayodhya Kand*. Rajaji has brought out some of that sublime pathos in his beautiful translation. I have never been able to read *Ayodhya Kand* of Tulsi's Ramayana without tears and Rajaji's translation of Kamban in verse has been equally remarkable.

For one familiar with Tulsidas, it is easy to appreciate the charm, the beauty and sublimity and the life-giving devotion of Kamban, and Rajaji has done a great service by making some portions of that immortal work known to non-Tamilians. Somewhere Tulsidas has said that Rama's name is greater even than Rama himself. It is equally true that Tulsidas and Kamban are greater even than Valmiki. Tulsidas says that Rama incarnate was able to give salvation to but a few but his name remembered and repeated has been the salvation of numberless saints and sinners, and will continue to be so till the end of time. Even so, Valmiki brought Rama home only to those who study and know Sanskrit which, as its very name implies, is the language of the cultured few. Kamban touches the heart and ennobles the mind even of the unlettered. It will be doing a great service if someone were able to render Kamban into Hindi verse and Tulsidas into Tamil verse.

Reading the present translation I felt in many places as if I was reading Tulsidas. The thought, even the expression, was not only similar but the same, although in places the story might have differed. Therein lies India's unity in diversity, hidden but persistent and everlasting.

22nd April, 1955

Rajendra Prasad



## I

The difference between Valmiki and Kamban, or between Valmiki and Tulasidas, is that with the later poet Rama is God at every turn, while in Valmiki though Rama is undoubtedly recognised as an incarnation of Vishnu, yet the treatment of character and incident throughout is only as of a good and valiant prince, and the God-hood is forgotten as it were. By the time Kamban and Tulasi came to sing the Ramayana, Rama had become God Himself and so completely deified for generations with temple and rituals dedicated to His worship that it would have been wholly artificial for Kamban or Tulasi to do as Valmiki did and to tell the story of Rama as just a heroic romance. The men, women and children who were to hear Kamban knew Rama only as God incarnate.

To try to undo the work of ages and to undeify Rama and Krishna in India would be as futile as positively mischievous. In them are rooted our whole living culture, a culture of which we may be proud. We cannot cut off a vital organ and hope to live. Deceived by the glamour of the superstructures let us not shake the foundations of rough-hewn granite on which the house we live in rests. It would be disastrous. India cannot be India without Rama and Krishna.

It may be easy and even more satisfactory to tell the Ramayana in English or French as a story of the Imperial Prince of Ayodhya rather than that of God come down on earth. Such a presentation may read well in the foreign medium. Not so if we tell the story in any of the mother-tongues of the children of India. Imagine re-writing the Bible and converting it into the story of a good and pious young man who obtained a large following by his simple approach to religion, but who was sentenced to death by the official judge at the instance of a jealous group of interested priests of whose disloyalty a weak central government was living in continuous fear. The story would be interesting enough and have its lessons, but it would not be the foundation of Christianity such as it now is as the story of the Son



of God come down to bring the message of compassion and grace to mankind. What might suit a foreign medium would be disastrously inadequate for the people whom the idyll has nursed and sustained for ages as a story of direct divine interest in the affairs of men and as a rock on which their higher life firmly rests. Kamban lived in the times of our Alwars and was one of them, and he sang the story of Rama as God come down on earth to suffer, chasten, uplift, help and guide men. And he has found an honoured place among the great Bhaktas.

Apart from this difference in the treatment of the hero, there is considerable difference in poetic form between Valmiki and Kamban. Kamban's Ramayana is a lyric, while Valmiki's is an epic. The lyric is a string of cut-gems with glittering facets sparkling at each turn. It is not a solemn march of pre-destined sadness as is Valmiki's epic. The lyric sparkle of Kamban and Tulasi goes well with their constant reminder that Rama is the Supreme Being Himself.

The unique characteristic of Tamil verse is the initial rhyme. In good Tamil poetry, unlike the end-rhyme in English or Hindustani, it is not just a purposeless jingle that has become a custom. The initial rhyme in Tamil is a medium of emphasis and climax and it is a remarkably efficient medium. So also the alliteration, which is also an essential in Tamil verse, is not merely an idle sound-repetition but actively aids the enforcement of the thought and imagery contained in the verses. Of course these aids are of no value in unskilled hands and become just jingles. But in Kamban's art, the alliteration is subdued with great care and the rhyme words always go up with mounting quality and are never allowed to deteriorate into a laboured selection out of a thesaurus. They come with a clap of appropriateness on the top of an ascending scale. This quality among many other things distinguishes Kamban from the inferior Tamil poets. The lyric cannot be a lyric without conspicuous economy of words, without sparkle and lilt, and these are Kamban's special characteristics not to speak of the depth of his thoughts, his human understanding and his wonderful poetic imagination.

I cannot in an English rendering bring out the rhyme or the sparkle or the lilt. I can only attempt to do some justice to the wealth of substance and brevity of presentment. The

rendering is almost literal. It may help non-Tamil listeners to have some idea of the quality of Kamban of whom the Tamil people are so justly proud.

The sage Visvamitra presents the Prince of Ayodhya to Janaka, the illustrious philosopher-king, and informs him of his desire that Rama should see the reputed bow of Siva. It was well known that Janaka had sworn to give his daughter away in marriage only to one who bent and strung that bow.

Said the great King to Visvamitra  
“My thoughts do run before my words  
Oft have I said to myself  
Seeing Sita languishing  
In fasts and holy vows  
I fear this bow may prove  
Stronger than my star  
And end my life in grief.  
May be this prince of yours  
May bend and string this bow—  
Whereat so many a prince  
Has tried and failed before—  
And from this sea of grief  
May lift me up to shore.”

“Go”, said the King to the waiting men  
“Bring the ancient bow at once  
And place it before this noble prince.”  
“Aye ! our liege” they said  
And four of them, they sped  
To where the sacred bow  
Was kept enshrined.

Dark-haired mammoth men  
With heavy locks o’er hanging  
Shoulders shaped like granite boulders  
They carried the ancient bow  
Whose secret weight confounded  
And made them halt for breath  
Many a time.



Earth was glad  
There was a shift  
Of the weight on her back.  
The great mountain of the North  
Felt an uneasy rivalry.  
World-space felt narrow  
When ocean-like the crowds  
With tumultuous noise  
Came to watch  
This trial at the mystic bow.

“Is this Mount Meru shaped into a bow  
Meru with which the gods did churn  
The ocean once upon a time?  
Or is it the Serpent god  
On whose head rests the Earth  
Or is it the far off rainbow of heaven  
Come down to earth in solid form?”

“Should a maiden’s fate be hung on this?  
Can any prince be ever found  
To lift and bend this formidable thing,  
Unless indeed a miracle be worked?  
Alas, for the girl  
Tied to this impossible pledge.”

When thus the maidens talked annoyed  
They placed the heavy bow on the ground  
Which many a noble prince had scanned  
And threw up his hands in utter despair,  
So many saw but none did dare.

The King, he looked at the stalwart form  
Of the beautiful prince from great Ayodhya  
But then he looked at the terrible bow  
Which seemed to hold his destined grief  
And sadly he thought of his pledge-bound girl.

The King’s good priest Sadanand spoke

Who understood his sovereign's grief:  
"The Goddess Earth's resplendent form  
Lies concealed from the eyes of men;  
Her glory is seen in the golden harvest  
That issues from the good plough-share.  
But when our King he cut a furrow  
In the holy field, Earth herself  
Appeared as a child in golden glory;  
And ocean's child Lakshmi herself  
Twin companion of the drink of gods  
Yields honoured place to our princess here  
Sita of resplendent beauty."

Visvamitra made a sign  
Whereat like the impetuous flame  
That from the sacrificial fire  
Rises to meet the falling *ghee*  
Rama rose, and the gods above  
Shouted in joy and the *rishis* below  
Eagerly uttered benediction.

The charming prince he stood erect  
But then before he reached the bow  
That his holy guide desired him bend  
The god of love he bent his bow  
And a thousand shafts did pierce the hearts  
Of a thousand maidens there assembled.

"Look at this bow intervening,  
It is hard on this prince and on the maid,"  
Said one,  
"If our bashful Sita's beautiful hand  
Should fail to win the loving grasp  
Of this fair prince's broad brave hand  
What is left for poor Sita's heart  
But joyless years  
To pine and die?"  
Said another,

“If the King he wishes his girl to wed,  
And such a prince has come to ask,  
“Yes” should be the single word  
And hands that instant sweetly joined.  
Instead he’s planned his own undoing  
Foolishly placing this ancient bow  
Between the princess and her joy.”

While the maids thus whispered anxious words  
The prince advanced with stately stride  
More majestic than the steps of a lion  
Or a coronation elephant.  
Assembled elders chanted benisons  
And the gods above that knew they cheered.

The bow forbidding was there out-stretched  
Like a great mountain lying flat;  
The prince extended he his hand  
And seized it well.  
Wonder of wonders !  
Is it the bow indeed  
Or is’t a wreath of fragrant flowers,  
He has so lightly raised  
To put round Sita’s neck?

They watched unwinking but could not tell  
When he placed the bow  
Firm against his foot,  
Or when he strung it true and pulled.  
They saw the prince he held it well,  
They heard the thunder  
Of its breaking !

The gods acclaimed and showered flowers  
And from the clouds fell golden rain ;  
The sea of thronging men they threw  
Pearls and gems on the valiant prince ;  
Assembled holy men they blessed  
The King in his hour of greatest joy.



## II

Rama and Sita are in the forest. They found themselves remarkably happy in the hut that adept Lakshmana built for them. The surroundings were beautiful and they so enjoyed the peace and beauty of forest life that they had no regrets for what they had left behind in Ayodhya, except that now and then Rama thought of his father and his heart sank. "I have done all I could to save his honour but how can I take away his great grief?" This thought was a telepathic reaction to what was then actually happening in Ayodhya.

Both Valmiki and Kamban leave the princes and Sita at this stage and go back to Ayodhya. Fast-going messengers were sent to Bharata. And Bharata received them and in response to the urgent call that the messengers conveyed, he left for Ayodhya not knowing what was waiting for him there. Then follow some of the tensest situations in the Ramayana. What can approach the exquisite pathos of the situation where the most innocent of men Bharata, has become the motive for the most cruel among wicked deeds ever recorded, *viz.*, the banishment of Rama, beloved of all, to the forests of Dandaka? Bharata's meeting his mother Kaikeyi and the scene where the doubly-bereaved Kausalya, mother of Rama, receives Bharata at first with natural suspicion and a sense of distance, and then seeing his utter innocence completely breaks down—these scenes are painted with unrivalled beauty by Kamban.

The messengers carried the message  
They went by the shortest route.  
Day and night,  
As fast as they could, they rode.  
And when they reached the palace of the prince  
They charged the men at the gate  
At once to announce to the prince  
That Dasaratha's men had come  
And desired to be seen.



“Prince, men have come from the King, your father  
Bearing a message for you”, they said.  
And up he rose to see them  
For great was his eagerness  
To hear from the King, his father.

“Is he well, the King, my lord?” cried he  
Not waiting for them to speak.  
“He’s well”, said they  
And quieted his anxious heart.  
“And is the dear Crown Prince well?”  
“Yes”, said they and he clasped his hands  
In thankfulness and joy.

And after loving enquiries  
About the rest, the envoys said  
“Here is the royal epistle  
May it please you take it,  
Prince, whose beauty baffles the painters !”

He stood to receive the royal letter  
And first he placed it on his head,  
As if it were holy ashes  
Received at a sacred shrine  
And after, opened it to read.  
Glad he was to be asked  
To go to Ayodhya at once  
For eager was the prince  
To be with noble Rama again.

No time was lost  
To find auspicious hour or day;  
Car and convoy were ordered at once  
His uncle’s leave was taken  
And he stood at the car  
Calling for Satrughna  
To hurry up.

Elephants and chariots  
Troops and drums

All noisily gathered to march with the prince  
To his native city.  
Soft music played to send the prince away  
The harmony was sweet to the ear;  
And hymns of praise were lustily sung  
Wishing the beloved prince  
Safe journey and every joy.

Fast they sped seven days and nights,  
Crossing hills and rivers  
And after, reached Kosala  
Famed for rich green fields and over-flowing  
channels.

But what was this he saw?  
The fields were lone  
And no one at the plough,  
And young men in the streets  
Wore no flowers on their necks,  
And Ayodhya's face  
Was like a withered lotus.

The flutes of the city were still  
And he did not hear the anklet-bells  
Of happy dancing maids.  
The balconies were empty  
And the towers were left  
Undecorated, bare.

"The faces I see  
Have no laughter in them,  
No incense issues from the houses I pass,  
The maids I see have no flowers on their heads,  
Unlighted are the house lamps."  
"It seems I must prepare", he thought  
"For some heavy news."

Straight he went to where the King must be  
But found him not  
"This is strange", he thought  
And his brave big frame now trembled in fear.

Came hurrying a maid who rushed to him and said  
"Your mother wants you come at once."

Mother and son were locked  
In joyous embrace.  
"Is father well?" she asked,  
"The queens and my sisters?"

"Yes, yes", said the prince  
"But tell me where the emperor is;  
I long to kiss his lotus feet  
I found him not where he must be."

The hard-hearted queen  
Un-perturbed she spoke  
"Son, summoned by the gods above  
The King your father left us.  
Like a conquering hero  
He has joined the gods  
Grieve not for this!"

Like a javelin sharp, these words  
Pierced the prince's heart  
And he fainted and fell.  
His beautiful locks spread out  
He lay on the ground  
Like a tall tree blown down in a sudden storm.

Pale his lips, and his beautiful eyes  
Streaming tears, he asked  
"What have I heard from you my mother?  
Fire cannot burn as your words have burnt!

"O father, how could you leave  
Your people thus to grieve?  
You destroyed of yore  
The enemies of the gods.  
Is it they still have foes  
Whom to battle with?  
Wherefore called they you again  
O mighty shouldered warrior?"

Thus did he weep disconsolate  
Like an orphaned child  
And to the loving women around  
He said, "Now let me go  
To dear Rama and kiss his feet  
Who now is father and lord  
To fatherless me."

Whereat his mother compunctionless  
Spoke these cruel words  
"Brave prince, he whom you seek  
To the forest he has gone  
With his wife and brother."

The prince was dazed and utterly confused  
"Well, let me hear", he said  
"What more have you to tell?"  
"Has Rama gone to the forest?  
What was the crime  
For which exile was ordained?  
And how did the angry gods  
Bring it about? Tell me all  
How did the fates contrive?"

"He could not have sinned  
Except for some great good.  
Tell me now was it after or before  
My father's death?  
Good mother! Do make things clear for me."

Said Kaikeyi, "My son!  
It was not any deadly sin  
Against guru or violent deed  
Deliberate or accidental,  
Even when the King was alive  
Radiant like the sun himself  
Rama went to live in the forest."

"Was he guiltless?  
Did no enemies seize and carry him?"



Did he do no un-intended deed  
To bring this penance about ?  
Then why when father was alive  
Should a prince for penance go?  
And how did the King die?  
Tell me now and keep me  
No longer in suspense."

"Son, listen now, I obtained from the King  
A boon and made the kingdom yours,  
And got the prince exiled  
To make the kingdom safe for you.  
Grieving for this the Emperor died."

Bharata's hands were on his ears  
Not bearing to hear these cruel words;  
His brows quivered, and his breath  
Was like a furnace throwing flames  
And his eyes spouted tears of blood.

Fierce was the prince's wrath  
Against his evil mother  
But he refrained from violent deed  
For the vision of Rama rose  
Before him sternly disapproving.

But he let go angry words;  
"Your machination foul and wicked  
Has killed my father and consigned  
My noble brother to forest life;  
And you boast to me this double achievement.  
Yet I tear not your wicked mouth  
And do you want me to complete  
This plan abominable  
By eagerly seizing my brother's crown?"

He lapsed silent, and sunk in thought:  
"No, Dharma is not dead" he cried  
"Dharma has survived wickedness.  
For Ayodhya had a king who died

And a prince his heritage renounced  
That the pledged word may still be honoured;  
And if Bharata be mean enough  
To profit thereby, blame we the times?

No, no, my crime shall be  
My own misfortune  
And not belong to the times  
That produced Rama and my father.”  
He could no longer bear  
To stay by the wicked mother  
And left to find some consolation  
At Queen Kausalya's blessed feet.

And when he saw the bereaved Queen  
Grief overwhelmed him once again  
He dropped like lead on the ground  
And bathed her feet in tears.

“Mother dear!” he cried  
“Your wretched son craves your blessing.  
Oh where is my father gone?  
And where is my great good brother?  
Am I to face this ruin, alone?  
Unfriended wretch am I indeed.

Could you not hold him back for me?  
Were you all and your combined strength  
Unequal to the power of Death?”  
And like a stricken bird he fluttered  
And rolled on the ground and wept.

“The evil woman that brought this about  
The gods and her sin could have struck her dead.  
But how can I ask for that when this thief  
That is son of her body is not dead but alive—  
Although his death would solve at once  
This chaos and universal grief.

“Heaven's charioteer that drives  
Darkness out of this world

Was father to this ancient royal clan  
Came a scion of that house to be born  
Bharata, another name for shame  
O my mother, why was I born?"

Thus wept the prince unrivalled  
In strength of limbs and spotless mind,  
The twice bereaved queen  
For a moment thought her exiled son beloved  
Returned and stood before her.  
She gathered Bharata up  
And pressed him to her anguished bosom.

"Prince among princes  
Bharata my son!" she cried  
"In the long line of your great race  
There was none so noble as you, my son!"  
Moved was she to her depths as she thought  
And thought again of all he had said.

### III

Bharata's passion had for the time subsided. And the people and princes and elders, led by the Sage Vasishta, called upon the good prince to accept the crown and undertake the governance of the State. Bharata had no difficulty in convincing the wise men that what they proposed was fundamentally wrong. He proposed a better solution which was acclaimed with universal approbation. Bharata's self-reproach and humility are beautifully brought out by Kamban. Unfortunately, it is not possible to reproduce in a translation the exquisite art of the poet. I must point this out not only in introducing this particular chapter of Kamban but in respect of the whole of my effort in the direction of illustratively presenting Kamban to non-Tamil-knowing people, and indeed in respect of all translations of poetry by the ablest among us from one language to another. Let me quote William Cowper who wrote in one of his beautiful letters: "There are minutae in every language which transferred into another will spoil the version. Such extreme fidelity is in fact unfaithful."

But what is one to do who does not wish to impose on the public and palm off one's own bad composition as a rendering of Kamban? All one can do is to avoid pitfalls and be as faithful as possible where he can do so without damage to the purpose. In another letter the same poet wrote: "There is something in his style that touches me exceedingly and which I do not know how to describe. This property of it which depends perhaps altogether upon the arrangement of his words and the modulation of his sentences, it would be very difficult to preserve in a translation."

Yet another quotation from Cowper dealing with the difficulty of satisfactory translation. "It cost me all the morning yesterday and all the evening to translate a single simile to my mind. The transitions from one member of the subject



to another, though easy and natural in the Greek, turn out often so intolerably awkward in an English version that almost endless labour and no little address are requisite to give them grace and elegance." I must say that I have gone through many occasions of this kind especially where Kamban in the midst of the human narrative suddenly and with exquisite beauty reminds his readers of the fact that Rama was God incarnate.

When the sad people of the City learnt  
That Kaikeyi's son was disconsolate  
They had a consultation hurried  
And a general council was summoned at once  
Of ministers of State and citizen leaders,  
Army captains and provincial chiefs,  
Family priests and bearded elders;  
And round the handsome prince they sat  
Each in his appointed place.

When all were ready the good Sumantra  
Turned to Vasishta who understood.  
Spoke he then to the prince these words :  
"Son of Dasaratha ! your duty is clear,  
The people need a protecting hand,  
And now there can be no other choice.  
The sharp sword and strong hand  
Of the king is like the sun during day  
And the moon and shining stars at night,  
Without which all would be dark and confused.

"Learned and pious elders all,  
Kings and grey-haired men assembled  
Desire that you do take the chair of State  
For due maintenance of law  
And eternal dharma as in the days  
Of your great father gone to Heaven.

"Disintegration awaits the State  
That has no king that rules  
Even like the body bereft of the spirit  
That from within governs.

No society, be it of gods  
Or of the enemies of good,  
No world of any sort or kind  
Can hold without a protecting king.

“And if we look about us well  
Here on earth or in the heavens,  
The unending number of things that move  
Or which seem to move or live,  
Maintained are they all by order and rule.

“The King your father is dead, and Rama  
Eldest born has renounced and gone.  
The mantle has fallen on you unsought  
By the King's boon your mother had earned.  
This State must needs be ruled, O Prince!  
This is our well-considered counsel;  
It is for you to save the people;  
In you alone, Prince, lies their hope.”

The sage's words were charged  
With deep emotion, but the prince  
Trembled as one to whom a poison cup  
Was given to drink and die.  
Broad-shouldered brave Bharata's heart  
Throbbled like a woman's heart excited.  
Everything swam before his eyes  
But he gathered himself and spoke :

“When the peerless prince my brother  
Dasaratha's eldest son is living  
You counsel me to wear the crown!  
Revered sires, if this be Dharma,  
As it must be when you say it,  
Then who can blame my mother now ?  
Her deed would stand approved by you.

“Experienced in the affairs of kings,  
Tell me whether in the history of states  
From the earliest days of yore till now,

Was any younger son ever called  
To govern the land when the elder was alive ?

“It would be a shame, honoured men,  
I cannot do it as you desire :  
Go I must to the forest at once,  
And bring Rama back from exile  
And see him duly installed as King.  
Else understand I’m firmly resolved  
To spend my years in the forest too;  
Or else, reverend sires, I die !”

Whereat there was acclaim  
Loud and universal :  
“Noble Prince, you need no crown  
Nor deeds nor sacrifices religious.  
The fourteen worlds may disappear  
Your glory shall be  
For ever and ever !”

Said Bharata then to his brother there  
“Satrughna dear ! Let the trumpet sound  
And be it proclaimed that Bharata goes  
To bring the King  
Home to Ayodhya again!  
Let a great army prepare  
At once to march with me.”

And when the proclamation was made  
With tumultuous cheers it was received.  
The dead city came to life  
And gloom and grief gave place to joy.

Before morn next day the troops were ready,  
And the noise was like the roar of the sea.  
Kaikeyi’s foolish dream was shattered  
And nothing remained of it to hope.  
And great Ayodhya rejoiced  
As if she’d never grieved  
But rose from an ugly dream.

The army marched along  
Chariots and horses and mighty elephants  
But Bharata walked;  
“My lord the big brother has shown the way”  
Said Bharata, and on foot he went.



## IV

Kamban looks upon Rama as God incarnate. The worship is unqualified. But the poet's heart is obviously given away to two other men in the Ramayana, Guha and Bharata. Bharata is Kamban's supreme ideal. And Guha is his paragon of loyalty and I think in that respect he beats Lakshmana. Kamban closely follows Valmiki everywhere with great care and even where in some places with remarkable understanding and skill he deviates, the exception truly proves the rule. But he lets himself go freely with Guha, round whom his great poetic imagination plays with wonderful effect and originality. There must have been a popular long-standing tradition about Guha which Valmiki recognised and wove into his epic, but did not deal with that character as fully as he himself perhaps had intended. But Kamban has done full justice and, so to say, fulfilled Valmiki's intention. In dealing with Guha, the poet thinks and speaks through him. The devotees of Kamban may well look upon Kamban as an incarnation of Guha.

The prince and his army marched  
Through country waving with corn  
Watered by holy Kaveri,  
And reached the forest bank of Ganga.  
The prince's plight drew pity  
From man and bird and beast  
And even from the rooted trees.

Behind the brave and blameless prince  
That walked to seek his exiled brother  
Marched a huge full-limbed force  
And Guha watched from the other bank.  
"This must be a force led by Bharata  
Against the exiled prince" thought he.

His anger rose and the river-king  
Was a rugged man and fierce when angered;  
He laughed in scorn and his eyes shot fire,  
His nostrils swelled and eye-brows quivered,  
Red were his eyes and sharp his words,  
He bit his lips and buckled his sword.  
He sounded the bugle and shook his *tudi*  
To warn his tribe to look out for battle  
And his big shoulders swelled  
At the scent of war.

Hearing his call, the forest men  
Armed and gathered on the southern bank.  
Huge was the swell of fighting men  
That stood behind Guha ready for war.

"Brave denizens of the forest,  
The wicked host on the bank across  
Let us make a gift of them  
To the gods today and reinstal  
The exiled prince in his rightful place."

"Let us see how they will cross  
This wide river's rolling flood.  
Bowmen brave! will you quake?  
Or will you smash that army there  
Elephants and horses all?

"The honour of our tribe is at stake.  
'Friend' he called me, my brothers,  
And he must see  
His friend is brave and minds not death."

"This wicked prince, disloyal man  
He may not love his elder brother,  
He may not fear the younger tiger prince;  
But dare he come across the border  
When I am here to guard my friend?  
Let us prove today, my brothers,  
Woodmen's shafts can pierce even princes' bodies."

“My lord he gave them  
All the lands and waters that belonged to him.  
Will they deny him  
Even the forest here  
Which to us belongs?  
Down with that army,  
Waving flags and all !  
Rama will come back to his own  
By your courage, my men  
And your well-aimed shafts.”

Thus he said to his iron men  
And stood long bow in hand  
High shouldered friend of Rama  
Guha on the river bank across.  
Sumantra on the northern bank  
Saw Guha and knew him well.  
To the prince he ran and said  
“See there gallant Guha  
Lord of the river !

“Numberless boats he commands  
And an immense army of forest men  
Splendid bowmen all  
His name is Guha  
Dearest friend of Rama.  
This man of granite strength  
And loyalty limitless  
Dark and brave of form  
He is waiting on the road  
To give you worthy welcome.”

The prince of spotless mind  
Was joyed to hear this said :  
“Is he the friend who did embrace  
My banished brother and solaced him?  
When he did sadly walk in the forest wild?  
Then I must hasten forward  
Before he arrives here  
And tender him my gratitude.”

Impatient with love  
Bharata with his brother  
Went to the river bank and stood.  
The forest chieftain saw  
From where he stood afar  
And was amazed !

Down fell the bow from his hand  
As he saw the figure  
Clad in bark like an anchorite,  
With face sorrow-laden  
A sight to melt the stoniest heart,  
Beautiful but pale like the moon  
Riding the day-light sky.\*

And Guha said to himself  
"The prince is so like dear Lord Rama,  
And he who stands beside him too  
Is a very likeness of beloved Lakshmana.  
It seems this prince is lamenting  
And has upon him the habit of hermits."

"He salutes Rama  
Turning to where he must be  
Even without seeing him.  
O ! was I not wrong to think  
That any brother of my Rama  
Could ever do a thing so mean?"

He told his men what he thought;  
And asking them to be wary  
He himself took a boat  
And went across to salute the prince.

Bharata stood with palms joined;  
And when Guha bowed obeisance,  
The prince before whom  
The very gods were humble  
He felt at Guha's feet,



For this was the man who sweet solace gave  
To Rama whom his own mother had wronged.

And the forest chieftain  
Lifted him up with love  
Greater than a father's love  
And clasped him to his rugged bosom,  
Guha, most worthy of men,  
Who has found a place  
In the hearts of pious mortals  
Through the ages since Rama's time.

Asked Guha,  
"Prince of mighty frame,  
What is your mission?"  
Said Bharata in answer:  
"My father that ruled an empire  
Deflected the course of ancient custom.  
I have come to set that right  
And take the King home to the city."

The wild men's chief who heard these words  
Burst into tears of joy.  
Down he fell on the ground again  
And locked Bharata's beautiful feet  
In his rough hands and wept.

"The kingdom of the world was yours  
Which at your mother's desire  
Your father gave to you.  
You refused to touch the gift  
Avoiding it as an evil thing.  
Grief is in your face  
Like a great river dammed.  
Admirable soul, your greatness is more  
Than a thousand Ramas, believe me, prince."

"What is a poor hunter's praise?  
Like the Sun who makes pale all other lights,  
The glories of your glorious race

You have made into one great glory of yours,  
Mighty-armed mighty-souled  
Prince unrivalled !”

Asked Bharata :

“Guha, dear tell me where  
My brother rested here with you?”

Said the *Nishada* “Go with me  
I’ll take you to the holy spot.”

Bharata saw the stone with the grass thereon spread  
On which the Prince of Ayodhya slept.

Bharata could not bear the sight  
And his tears bathed the ground  
As he knelt on earth :

“For me was all this suffered by you;  
Roots and half-cooked fruits you ate;  
The grass was your bed, beloved Rama,  
And I do live and the golden crown  
I am told must duly adorn my head  
And wealth and luxury heaped on me !”

“Show me the place where Lakshmana slept”,  
Asked simple-hearted Bharata again,  
Wanting to kiss the holy spot.  
And Guha answered, “Beloved prince,  
When on the hard stone Rama slept  
And Sita too did lay herself  
Down on that cruel bed,  
Lakshmana could not bear the sight.  
His eyes filled with tears  
And all night long bow in hand  
He stood awake watching around  
Lest any wild forest-beast hurt them.”

## V

The meeting of Rama and Bharata is for the pious Hindu a great chapter in the Ramayana. The Hindu way of life is fixed for ever in this episode such as no painting and no marble can contain. No wonder that this is the scene that figures most prominently in the festivals of Upper India where the Rama legend is, one many say, even more popular and deep-rooted than in the South. This chapter of Kamban has some of his most exquisitely beautiful verses.

In this scene, Ayodhya has her revenge on the forest. The city and the palace are all gathered at Chitrakuta around Rama and the forest is converted into a busy city. This great reunion at Chitrakuta made a turning point in Rama's forest life. After the *Milap*, he could not bear to continue in that happy place to which memories of the reunion got attached, memories of mother, brothers and beloved elders—in fact, the Ayodhya atmosphere. So he leaves Chitrakuta and goes away to the interior of Dandaka where there would be no memory of the past and where the gods had decided to enact the great tragedy.

Bharata reached the hermitage  
Of holy Bharadwaja  
His heart hungering for love  
And his troubled mind for advice :  
The Sage's face it shone benignant  
The picture of Siva himself with the crescent moon  
Quivering in his hermit crown of matted hair.

He blessed the prince from Ayodhya and said  
“Undying glory to you my son,  
The golden crown is yours  
The kingdom awaits your rule.  
Then why this hermit's habit  
And why glue-twisted locks for a crown?”

The poignant words hurt like a stab.  
Indignant rose the prince, his face  
Aflame with the wrath of innocence.  
He gasped for breath; then, "Sire!" said he  
"These your words I've not deserved ;  
Befit they your holy mouth?"

"Forgive me revered father", he said  
"Never can I touch what belongs me not.  
The kingdom is Rama's by ancient rule  
And if he does not rule as he should  
The years may roll but my abode  
Shall surely be the forest here."

The holy men that heard these words,  
Bharadwaja and others with him  
Were beside themselves for joy to see  
The youthful prince by love had achieved  
What sages by penance struggled to attain,  
True *sanyas* and self-command.

Lovingly Bharadwaja led  
The resolute prince to his hermitage.  
And there was a feast that day in the forest  
Served by the gods as the sage desired—  
For angels obey when hermits command—  
To the prince's troops and the citizen crowd.  
Men and women ate and drank  
Till everyone was in a trance  
Transported to another world.

Something is happening, Lakshmana thought,  
And up a steep hill he climbed and saw.  
Bowmen and horses !  
An army was coming !  
Down he leaped and ran to his brother.

"Brother", said he, "an army's on us  
Led by Bharata newly installed,



Foolish pride has made him blind  
To your strength and mine, well, well !”

And saying this he rushed to the hut  
And returned full panoplied  
With bow in hand and quiver strapped  
Wanting orders ready for battle  
Against the impious usurping brother.

“See you now, my brother !  
Alone, shall I defend you against this wretch  
Who stands detested here below,  
And whom the gods above abhor.  
I shall smite him and his power today  
And you will rejoice in your little brother ;  
Our wrongs shall be avenged today.

“The ground shall be covered with the bodies of men  
Horses and elephants shall be dead,  
And a red river flow down the woods.  
The devils will feast and dance with joy  
Over the carcasses I shall make,  
And they and the gods together will celebrate  
Your restoration to the throne.

“You will see my might today undo  
The wrong that was wrought on the world by a king  
Whose foolish fondness for a wife  
Led this usurping brother to the throne.  
In your disconsolate mother’s grief  
Kaikeyi found her wicked joy :  
Loud shall be her lamentation  
Learning the event of the battle today.”

Rama let his brother talk  
For he knew his love  
And the angry anguish of his heart.  
“Lakshmana dear, do I not know  
The might of your arm and the power of your bow?

“But listen now, how can you think  
A brother in whom flows the blood  
Of our long line of honoured kings  
Can do a deed so foul as you fear?  
Your love for me has warped your judgment.

“Did we not ever find our brother  
The embodiment of all that is good  
The very image of Dharma itself?  
The Vedas could go wrong, not he!  
Proud were we of Bharata  
Strong-armed but ever just.  
Shall we suspect sin in him  
Whom we both knew well to be  
The axle-tree of righteousness?

“O Lakshmana dear, do not this wrong  
The very thought would be a sin.  
Bharata comes but to see me sure  
Impelled by love and not for greed  
As you will see when he arrives.”

Thus spoke Rama in kindly tones  
And almost then stood before them,  
Bharata ; for ordering the army  
To stay behind, he had hurried forward.  
O the sight! Is it the brother  
Or Grief herself in human form?

Emaciated, with tear-flooded eyes,  
Distraught, clasped hands raised overhead,  
Innocence herself begging forgiveness,  
Rama saw this figure of sadness  
And gravely turning to Lakshmana said,  
“See you the enemy whose army you thought  
To smite and utterly destroy?”

Lakshmana was pale with shame and grief.  
Down dropped the bow from his hand;  
The tears streamed from his eyes.

And Bharata spoke :  
"What have you done my lord and brother?  
Cruel to me and pitiless,  
You left your post of inviolable duty,  
Allowed the rule of ancient custom  
To be deflected from its course."

This stern impeachment done  
His strength did fail  
For now, he saw  
The dear dead father in Rama !  
He fell prostrate and the anguish of his heart  
His eyes poured  
On Rama's lotus feet.

And Rama's tears came then in a flood  
Bathing Bharata's anchorite hair  
Like Ganga entering Siva's head.  
He lifted him up  
And hugged him to his heart.  
Like two gods they stood  
Compassion and Innocence  
Locked in embrace.

Then Rama eyed him up and down  
His hermit clothes and his wasted form :  
He thought many things and thought  
Of those he had left behind.  
Gently he spoke : "My brother,  
How is the King our father?  
I trust his shoulders are as strong as ever?"

Whereat Bharata said :  
"Oh my brother ! Father is dead!  
Death came to him in the shape  
Of the cruel woman that gave me birth.  
In the grief of your parting he languished and died :  
Truth and body he left behind  
And joined the gods to whom he belonged."

At these words that pierced his heart  
Rama reeled like as one  
Once wounded pierced in the wound again.  
He fell and rolled on the ground :  
Yes, even he that was God Himself  
And he wept like a child long and loud.

“O votive lamp, that burnt so long!  
Art thou extinguished now?  
O King that was father to your people,  
Compassion's stronghold,  
Have you left us for ever?

“Father, art thou gone? then to whom  
Shall we turn for truth's exemplar,  
O lion among the kings of the world?

“O Battle-worn King!  
By prayers and sacrifices rare . . .  
You found a son, Ah me!  
Who brought you nought  
But grief and death.  
The prince he tells me  
You languished for me and died.  
But here I am holding life  
Precious even when you are gone.

“Gone with you is largesse,  
Gone is honour  
And valour that the gods may envy!  
Gone is even-handed justice,  
Truth unswerving,  
Gone with you is royal sway  
Kindlier than the rays of the moon.”

Thus did Rama lament  
And roll on the ground  
And those around him  
Tried to soothe his grief.



Vasishta spoke : "Know you not, prince  
If men are born they must also die.  
And man's sole companions  
Are what he renounces and his works?  
You should not grieve, you that know."

"Countless are births and countless are deaths  
And in between, vain illusions,  
Attachments born of pain and pleasure.  
Pitiless death makes no distinction.  
When even the yet unborn  
Are claimed by Death in the womb,  
Must you grieve for one who is gone  
Ripe in age after a well-filled life?

"Dasaratha ruled for long  
And blameless was the rule  
Like spotless chastity;  
It is not meet we grieve :  
The King your father  
Lived full and well.  
Happy is he with the gods.  
As all our people do  
May your beautiful hands, my princes,  
Offer oblations to the dead."

And so the prince of Ayodhya  
Plunged in the river and there standing,  
Thrice out of his hands  
Reverently offered oblations to the dead  
According to ancient custom.

Proceeded they to the hermitage  
And before they reached,  
Came out from the lone hut, Sita.  
And when Bharata saw her,  
The princess from whom great palaces  
Drew greater beauty when she dwelt in them,  
He covered his eyes with his hands  
And fell at her feet weeping.

And Rama tenderly took him up  
And clasping him in embrace,  
He turned to Sita and said  
"Princess, know the King is dead  
He could not bear the anguish  
Of my unfortunate separation  
And Bharata has come to tell us."

She shook at the words  
Her beautiful eyes melted  
Into a flood of tears.  
She dropped to the ground and placed her arm  
On her mother Earth and wept.

Sprightly had been her steps  
As she walked the woods.  
In the forest she lived and laughed  
As in the city palace;  
So far grief lay utterly defeated.  
But when she heard  
The great King was dead  
And Bharata bore the message sad,  
Grief triumphed indeed  
And drowned the beautiful swan.  
She was led to the river and she too did  
Last offices to the departed King.

Then Sumantra arrived  
Who with the rest had stayed behind  
Bringing with him the bereaved queens  
And the trusty charioteer  
Saluted the princes.

At the sight of the Queens  
Burst Rama's grief again.  
"What have you all done with my father?" he cried  
And from his grief-red eyes  
Flowed tears that bathed their feet.  
Thus wept like a child, even He  
From whom issued the Creator himself.

There was lamentation loud  
And hearts melted like wax in the fire  
As the queens hugged Sita  
To their breasts and cried,  
Struggling for breath  
In their sea of grief.

Then came a great crowd  
For the army arrived  
And all who accompanied.  
They saw their dear prince again,  
And did not know  
Whether it was joy or grief,  
So confused were they.

And the sun then dipped in the western ocean  
For was he not the head of the house  
That mourned for the King that was dead,  
The ancient house that the Lord chose  
For Himself to appear on earth?

\* \* \*

Nobles and holy men  
And captains of the army  
Sat round the prince  
And his brothers three  
When Rama gently spoke  
Assuaging Bharata's anguish:

"Our father the King is dead  
And by his firm command  
The kingdom now is yours.  
Instead of wearing a crown  
Why these habiliments of an anchorite?  
Tell me now."

Then rose Bharata  
Quivering with emotion.  
His reverent hands were clasped  
As he faced his elder brother:

“Pre-eminent custodian of Dharma!  
Was it right for you  
Thus to leave your post of duty?  
Great was the error our father did;  
Infamous the wrong my mother wrought.  
Come back and be installed, my brother!  
And help to wipe out these horrid stains  
Of error and wickedness.  
Deny not, brother, who art father too.”

Moved was Rama and he saw  
Full well his spotless brother's anguish of mind.  
“Brave brother, listen. It would be wrong  
For sons to cast the father and mother  
That gave them birth to eternal shame.  
Our duty lies, let us remember,  
In making glorious what they did.”

“So, my brother, I am bound to do  
The King's behest; now argue not,  
And these few years, be regent on my behalf  
And rule on my commission.”

“Brother dear, it shall be so”  
The spotless prince agreed.  
“But be sure twice seven years hence  
To return and relieve your deputy;  
Failing which O Rama, I swear  
Fire shall right this infamous wrong!  
All purifying fire  
Shall that day bathe your brother  
For whom all this wrong was done.”

Rama was overwhelmed with joy  
Bharata's anguish of heart was gone.  
“Brother, so shall it be”, said Rama  
Whose greatness was greater  
Than all his wide-repeated praises.



"Fourteen years" said Bharata sobbing,  
And grieved that that must be;  
"I ask you a blessing brother", he said  
"Give me the sandals you are wearing."

And Rama took them off and gave  
What hold the power to give  
All the good that man may want,  
The dust of Rama's feet.

"My crown!" he said as on his head  
He placed the precious gift  
And tears rolled down his noble face.  
Then flat on the ground he fell  
In humble salutation,  
And he rose with the dust all over;  
Like the golden image of a god,  
He looked more beautiful than ever.

The city had filled the silent forest  
And now it was time to depart.  
The mothers sadly returned  
And so the women accompanying.  
And all the holy men departed;  
And the troops marched back  
With the city-crowd behind.  
And following them,  
Sadly went the Sage Vasishta.

As the great crowd cleared  
And the forest resumed its peace,  
The gods above that had come to watch  
Returned to their blessed abode,  
But the last to go with lingering steps  
Was good Guha the boat-man chief.

